



## Spring Break: A Time for Warm Sun and Cold-Hearted Scams

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**Media Contact:** Jerad Albracht, 608-224-5007  
Jim Dick, Communications Director, 608-224-5020

MADISON – College students and families statewide are finalizing their spring break plans and looking forward to some time away. But all that travel opens up opportunities for scammers to target elderly relatives back home with family emergency phone scams – more commonly known as the “grandparent scam.” To help protect family members in your absence, the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) asks travelers to have a discussion with senior relatives about these scams.

“It’s surprisingly easy for a crook to gather enough online information to impersonate a loved one,” said Sandy Chalmers, Assistant Deputy Secretary. “This is a scam we hear about on a regular basis in Wisconsin, so make sure your elderly friends and relatives know what to do if they get this call.”

Crooks routinely steal thousands of dollars from vulnerable seniors nationwide using the grandparent scam. Canadian law enforcement officers shut down a Montreal-based operation in February that was targeting American seniors.

Scammers target elderly victims by impersonating a grandchild claiming they need money for an emergency. The grandparent is asked to keep the call a secret from family members and authorities. The scammers typically request the money by wire transfer.

Of course, the entire story is a hoax – but the threat of a loved one in need clouds the victims’ judgment and makes them eager to help in any way they can.

The scammer may already know some basic facts about the grandchild they are impersonating – especially if the grandchild has a social media presence that is open to the public. A second person claiming to be a police officer, lawyer or bondsman may also call the grandparent to add legitimacy to the story.

DATCP offers these additional tips for handling these scam calls:

- Resist the pressure to act immediately.
- Hang up and try to contact the grandchild or another family member at a number that you know is accurate.
- Do not wire money or provide your bank or credit card account numbers.
- Verify the caller’s identity by asking personal questions a stranger could not answer.
- If you cannot reach a family member and still are not sure what to do, call the Bureau of Consumer Protection or your local police on their non-emergency line.
- Remember that this scam is not exclusively dependent upon the grandparent/grandchild relationship – scammers could also claim to be a niece or nephew or a family friend.
- If you repeatedly receive fraudulent calls, file a complaint with the police.

For more information about grandparent scams or other fraudulent activities targeting elderly citizens, visit the Consumer Protection website at <http://datcp.wisconsin.gov>, send an e-mail to [datcp hotline@wisconsin.gov](mailto:datcp hotline@wisconsin.gov) or call toll-free at 1-800-422-7128.

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